

DRAFT 9/28/89

Western Kentucky University  
Department Head vs. Department Chair

Western Kentucky University currently operates under the system of academic department heads as opposed to a system of department chairs. Historically heads have been more administratively oriented while chairs have leaned more toward faculty determination in setting the academic direction of a department.

The head vs. chair decision does not need to be an either/or situation at Western. The role of department chair is not one of being either an administrator or one of the faculty involved in shared governance. It must be both. Items from each definition can be used to accomplish the need for a strong leader who involves the departmental faculty in making major policy decisions for the department. The term chair describes this position better than the term head.

The position of department chair is one of the most difficult on a campus. This individual must conduct candid evaluations of faculty, recommend salaries, make promotion and tenure recommendations, and develop the departmental budget among many other things. At the same time, this individual must provide avenues for faculty decision making on academic matters within the department.

Outstanding leadership and personnel skills are required, as well as a respected reputation in the discipline. This individual must not be hesitant to act as a mentor to all faculty members in the department regardless

of their status or longevity. The chair must provide the motivation for a department to seek to be the best on the Western campus and beyond. Leadership requires that an individual make hard decisions in the best interests of the department, the college, and the university. Nonacademic matters cannot always be put to a vote.

A search shall be conducted for all departmental chair vacancies. An interim department chair may be appointed by the Vice President for Academic Affairs after consultation with the faculty and dean of the college. The search for a full-term department chair shall be an open search to both internal and external candidates. However, after consultation with the faculty, if both the dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs agree and can obtain the concurrence of the President, the search can be declared internal.

The faculty involvement in the selection process shall be to select the majority of the membership of the search committee from the tenured and tenure-track faculty, be a part of the interview process, and recommend no less than three acceptable candidates to the dean. If it is determined by the dean that it is not feasible to have the entire faculty of the department on the search committee, a reasonable distribution should result, with weight being given toward rank and tenure.

The dean's involvement shall be to appoint the full search committee, the majority of which shall have been selected by the faculty as mentioned



above, and the chair of the committee, with the concurrence of the Vice President for Academic Affairs; determine with the chair the number of candidates to be interviewed; be a part of the interview process; receive the recommendations of the department; and recommend no less than three candidates to the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs' involvement shall consist of conferring with the dean on the naming of the search committee, being a part of the interview process, receiving the recommendation of the dean, and recommending no less than two candidates to the President.

The President shall be involved in the interview process whenever possible and shall recommend the institution's choice to the Board of Regents.

Candidates should not be ranked when their names are sent forward. Comments by the committee and individuals forwarding the recommended names should be clear in providing an evaluation.

Most of the day-to-day decisions on a campus are made at the departmental level. This requires strong and wise leaders who must be free to operate effectively and without fear of being removed at any time over a single decision by a faculty vote. Except in rare circumstances, department chairs shall be tenured members of the department. However, the chair will be evaluated yearly by the faculty in his/her department. This annual evaluation will be administered by the dean. During the chair's fourth

year, the dean will conduct a more extensive evaluation for the purpose of determining if the dean will recommend to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and in turn to the President, that the chair should continue.

The yearly evaluation by the faculty will clearly indicate to the dean if a chair has lost the confidence of the faculty. Although an individual will be expected to serve a four-year cycle, the dean may determine that it is in the best interest of the department, college, and university that the chair be removed prior to the end of the chair's expected cycle. This should be done only with the concurrence of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the President and the full knowledge of the faculty.

Additional details will be prepared after the final decision is made on the above. The Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs will be asked to initiate a department chairs' handbook.